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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: MEASURED REACTIONS TO KOSTUNICA AND
DRASKOVIC STATEMENTS

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas McElhaney. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

Summary

11. (C) Recent comments attributed to Serbian officials, including Premier Vojislav Kostunica and Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic, linking Kosovo with the status of the Republika Srpska add fuel to the constant drumbeat of statements from Srpska PM Dodik about a referendum for Srpska independence. The response of Bosnian politicians until now has been muted. An upcoming visit by PM Kostunica to Republika Srpska may present an opportunity for both Dodik and Kostunica to continue push the envelope in linking Kosovo and RS status. We should discourage both from doing so. End Summary.

12. (SBU) RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik traveled to Belgrade over the weekend to celebrate Orthodox New Year, reportedly at the invitation of Serbian Premier Vojislav Kostunica. At an election rally on January 12, Kostunica was quoted in Bosnian dailies as highlighting Dodik's visit as an example of the "single cultural and ethnic space" occupied by Serbia and the RS "regardless of official or unofficial views." Kostunica reportedly went on to state that if Serbia "abandons the right to Kosovo, we would also abandon the right to defend and protect the RS as an independent part of Bosnia and Herzegovina." Kostunica's reference to the RS notably incorporated the use of the word "samostalan" meaning independent or autonomous. Kostunica's statement has been interpreted by many Bosnian commentators as linking a Serbian concession on Kosovo independence to relinquishing its ability to support independence aspirations in the RS; both similarly damaging to pan-Serb interests.

13. (U) Comments by Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic also received prominent press coverage in Bosnia. Following a meeting with Swedish FM and former High Representative Carl Bildt, Draskovic was quoted in Bosnian papers as stating that citizens in the RS "will have the right to self-determination and independence in case the UNSC approves the same request by Kosovo Albanians."

14. (U) In Bosnia, reactions to the Kostunica and Draskovic statements divided predictably along entity lines. Bosniak Presidency member Haris Silajdzic characterized the comments as "microphone aggression that will never succeed," adding that "Bosnia will not be destroyed" and will "remain within its current borders." In an extensive January 12 interview in the news magazine DANI, Silajdzic limited his comments on the issue to stating that "our neighbor is linking the Kosovo issue to one part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republika Srpska entity, quite openly, at the top level." Asked for his reaction to the Kostunica address, Nebojsa Radmanovic, Serb Chairman of the Tri-Presidency, characterized it as an "unofficial statement," and refused comment. Serb Minister

of Foreign Affairs Mladen Ivanic also had no official reaction. In a telephone interview Croat Presidency member Zeljko Komsic said that the Draskovic statements represent a clear interference into Bosnia's internal affairs that "will certainly have an effect on our bilateral relations."

¶5. (U) In an interview with Croatia-based daily Vecernji List Milorad Dodik, who has come close to advocating RS independence "under certain circumstances," avoided direct reference to the comments by Serbian officials. Asked about the impact of Kosovo status negotiations on Bosnia, Dodik stated that "nothing spectacular will happen and there won't be any kind of revolution" but added that the recognition of Kosovo independence would create a "new political logic in the region." Media outlets in the Republika Srpska have downplayed the remarks by Serbian leaders and, to date, other RS government officials have not responded in public comments.

Comment

¶6. (C) When Kostunica visits the RS January 18 and 19 (he is not visiting the national capital of Sarajevo, a slap in the face to Bosnia and Herzegovina leadership) he and PM Dodik could well turn up the rhetorical heat. Ambassador intends to strongly discourage Dodik from talking about referenda in the RS when he sees him next week. As done previously, it would be useful to remind Kostunica et al to stay away from invidious (RS/Kosovo) comparisons during his presence on BiH territory. End Comment.
MCELHANEY